

Dan Ludwig, Chair
Fairlee Forest Board
PO Box 261
Fairlee, VT 05045

February 23,2021

Sherry Smecker Winnie, Recreation Trails Program Manager
VT Department of FPR
Lands Admin. & Recreation Division Recreation Programs
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3801

Dear Sherry,

I have been asked to submit a letter in support of the Recreation Trails Program grant application submitted by the Town of Fairlee. While the Board has always supported most uses of the Town Forest, we feel at this time that we cannot support this application.

The Fairlee Forest Board is the governing body that manages the Town Forest. The grant application was written by a member of the “Friends” of the Fairlee Forest, a small group of citizens who are actively opposed to the sustainable forestry practices and recreational uses endorsed by the Board. We feel that the “Friends”, having been unhappy with the results of their attempts to change the direction of the management of the Forest, are using this application as a “Trojan Horse” to introduce their agenda and thwart the democratic process.

If there are to be major changes to be made the voters should be given a chance to weigh in. Our input has been that the Town residents and taxpayers are largely in support of the management practices of the Board with the guidance of Redstart Forestry in our efforts to maintain the Forest and improve wildlife habitat.

The Board feels that since the application commits the Taxpayers of the Town of Fairlee to financial liability to maintain the improvements implemented by the grant it is imperative that this be discussed in a public forum. Also, as one goal of the “Friends” is to draw people in to use the forest road system it appears that there has been no mention of the inevitable need for search and rescue that results from either medical emergency or inexperienced hikers lost in a large woodland tract of rough terrain surrounded by even larger tracts of woodlands.

The Town of Fairlee is currently ill equipped to handle back country rescue and we are concerned about potential liability if we promote the Forest as a recreational destination without the assets to deal with lost or injured visitors.

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Thank you for your good work.

Sincerely,

Fairlee Forest Board

Reg Cramer, Terry Lewis, Dan Ludwig, Chair, Mitch Phelps, Jim O'Donnell